

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LUSAKA 03061 301346Z

ACTION AF-10

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R 301120Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9148

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB PINS PINT ZA

SUBJ: RAILWAY WORKERS STRIKE

1. ANOTHER WILDCAT STRIKE BEGAN IN ZAMBIA AUGUST 29 AS RAILWAY WORKERS IN THE COPPERBELT CITIES OF NDOLA AND KABWE HALTED WORK OVER DELAY IN SALARY INCREASE. AS HAS BEEN THE CASE IN RECENT SPATE OF WORK STOPPAGES IN OTHER SECTORS, UNION LEADERS TRIED IN VAIN TO CONVINCE WORKERS TO GO BACK ON THE JOB. PLEAS BY OFFICIALS OFNLHE ZAMBIA RAILWAYS AMALGAMATED WORKERS UNION (ZRAWU) WERE MET BY JEERS FROM THE STRIKING EMPLOYEES. ALL CATEGORIES OF WORKERS IN NDOLA WALKED OUT WHILE IN KABWE STRIKERS INCLUDED MAINLY LOCOMOTIVE DRIVERS.

2. OFFICIALS OF THE RAILWAY MANAGEMENT AND THE ZRAWU REACHED A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT IN MARCH BY WHICH SALARY INCREASES WOULD BE GIVEN TO ALL CATEGORIES OF RAILWAY WORKERS WITH EFFECT FROM JANUARY 1978. THE NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WAS SENT TO THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COURT AND THE GOVERNMENT FOR APPROVAL AT THE END OF MARCH, BUT APPROVAL HAS NOT YET BEEN

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PAGE 02 LUSAKA 03061 301346Z

FORTHCOMING. BOTH MANAGEMENT AND UNION OFFICIALS STATE THEY HAVE BEEN PURSUING THE MATTER AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT A RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM COULD BE REACHED SHORTLY.

3. COMMENT: THE STRIKE HAS DISRUPTED MOST SERVICE ON THE MAIN LINE-OF-RAIL, AND IF IT CONTINUES FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME IT COULD HAVE A SERIOUS ADVERSE IMPACT ON BOTH IMPORTS AND

EXPORTS TRANSPORTED ON THE TAZARA. RAILWAYS ASSISTANT MANAGER RICHARD VEENIS SAID, HOWEVER, THAT ABOUT 200 WAGONS OF COPPER WERE SENT ON THEIR WAY TO DAR ES SALAAM SHORTLY BEFORE THE STRIKE. THIS MEANS THERE WILL BE BREATHING TIME BEFORE COPPER EXPORTS ARE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED. LIKEWISE, THE UNLOADED WAGONS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO BRING GOODS BACK TO ZAMBIA.

4. GOVERNMENT AND UNION OFFICIALS ARE SCHEDULED TO TALK TO THE STRIKING WORKERS TODAY (AUGUST 30) TO EXPLAIN THE CONSTRAINTS, INCLUDING THE FIVE PERCENT LIMITATION ON WAGE INCREASES WHICH IS PART OF THE IMF AGREEMENT, ON GOVERNMENT APPROVAL OF THE UNION-MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT OF MARCH. WHILE THIS IS UNLIKELY TO MAKE THE WORKERS VERY HAPPY, IT COULD COOL THINGS OFF ENOUGH TO GET THE MEN BACK TO WORK ON THE EXPECTATION THAT AT LEAST THEY WILL BE GETTING SOME INCREASE. WAGE INCREASES WHICH ARE SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN COST OF LIVING INCREASES, COMBINED WITH WHAT IS OBVIOUSLY POOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT, UNIONS, AND WORKERS, INDICATE THAT LABOR UNREST AND WILDCAT STRIKES ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME TO COME.
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